

WOODSMEN'S WEEKEND & DARTMOUTH LOGGING DAYS 1947-1992

Woodsmen's Weekend began in a talk among John Rand, Director of the D.O.C., Bill Robes, Kimball Union Academy woodcraft instructor, and Ross McKenney, the D.O.C.'s Woodcraft Advisor, about the unwillingness of students in the D.O.C. to tackle primitive camping trips, because they did not have the skills to survive in the woods. Robes thought of turning such skills into an informal competition between schools. Ross McKenney, as a former lumberjack competitor, had the tools for the job, and the result was the first Woodsmen's Weekend, held at Storrs Pond in May of '47 between the D.O.C., Kimball Union, and Williams.

The annual meet grew to include 10 or more schools, but Paul Smith's College under Gould Hoyt won the overall trophy for nine consecutive years in the 50's and 60's. K.U.A., Robes and Williams dropped out of the picture and McKenney retired in '59, but the spirit survived. After years without significant coaching in the 60's, the revival of serious Dartmouth interest in the contest came in large part from Jim Taylor '74. Meets were held regularly at Dartmouth again, women's and alumni team competition were introduced (the Women's team winning for the first time in '76) and after many close defeats to the University of Maine, Taylor and Put Blodgett '53 coached the men's team to their first victory in 22 years in 1978.

In the past decade, the competition has continued to evolve. Our Spring Weekend is now called Dartmouth Logging Days due to the gender-specific wording in Woodsmen's Weekend. Recently, the teams to watch have been those from the Community College of the Finger Lakes, under the direction of Marty Dodge. But through all the changes in participants and rivalries, and the increase in specialized saws and equipment, the spirit of skills and fellowship articulated by Robes and McKenney remains in this Spring Weekend Competition, a monument to days past but not forgotten.